



D I S L O C A T I O N





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## DISLOCATION

**H**undreds of international students are welcomed to UNSW Art & Design each year as we work together to grow Sydney's cultural diversity and global connections. With more than 50 countries represented on campus, students are drawn to Sydney's vibrant, cosmopolitan lifestyle for periods of exchange, or entire programs of study. However, language barriers, culture shock, immigration bureaucracy, the cost of living and social isolation are realities rarely addressed when promoting international study.

*Dislocation* invites international students to explore these experiences in an effort to convey how they navigate their time in Australia. This exhibition and publication aim to uncover deeper understandings about the challenges and triumphs that come from being a part of the international student community at UNSW Art & Design.

Pairing writers with *Dislocation's* participating artists, the interviews and essays in this publication explore the nuances and complexities of identity, flux and transition.

# SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

## The typology of international sentiments

Artist interview with Liu Sizhou by curator  
Cheung Lok Wang Jens.

**Hey Scott! How are you? It's been a while.**

Hi there, not bad, being busy while enjoying my holidays.

**We're here today to catch up with your latest work. Let's not waste time and talk about the project.**

Sure. I have been finding international students and documenting their portrait photos with different facial expressions, then I have printed their faces on transparent paper with double exposure effects.

**Love it! I'm interested in how you approach the participants and the process of making this work. Would you tell me some of the details?**

Yeah. I started with the people around me and some were strangers. Every photo shooting comes with a question, a question that will lead to a subtle change of facial expression. I found it quite interesting to ask questions, as I have to keep my smile to ease the participants' nerves, and soon I discovered the interaction brought me into the work, instead of a camera man who merely documents others' portraits.



*Self-Titled 2017*

**There are more than 30 participants in this work, and I really love how you position their shaky motions in grids. It works really well in bringing all different cultural backgrounds into one. Is that what inspired you?**

Yes, this work is inspired by the cultural differences of the people I've met. I want to address the idea of multiculturalism in Australia, yet pointing out the fundamental differences. For example, we as international students are here to learn and exchange knowledges, there is a shared core value among us. Meanwhile, cultural differences, language barriers, ways of thinking, are all differentiating us into unique beings. This is the similarities and the differences.

**Interesting. Your work now seems to be some sort of universal language to link us together.**

That's basically what I'm experimenting with, finding connections between others. As for the universal language of this work, I would say it's the emotions of us. Emotions are something that we have in common and can be altered by personal experiences in different circumstances. In this case, we gather in one place from different cultural backgrounds, where our emotions will be toned into a same or different mood.

**That's a great insight to address both differences and similarities of international students. Would you like to tell me more about the methodology of putting this work together?**

Sure, as you can see I have put the objects in a grid, that's actually inspired by the method of typology. It is simply classifying and grouping objects according to the specific general type. The name of the work is *Self-Titled*, in which the "self" can refer to myself as the creator of the work, the participants, and the audience perceiver, that I would like people to "title" (interpret) and trace the emotions within the work.

**In terms of the method, would you like to also discuss the installation? I'm intrigued by the arrangement of your concept.**

For the final result, I'll be putting the photographs into 3D and constructing into boxes. The different sizes of the boxes represent the personal emotions and the shared emotions. Sometimes we will face

situations alone and the intimate emotions will only belong to ourselves; some might be memorable to all of us, which will become collective emotions.

**I'm also curious of why keeping emotions in a box, is there a particular meaning to it?**

Some might interpret this as trapping emotions in a box and not sharing to others, but I will say it the other way, there's only "feel out of the box" to share your emotion to others. Emotions are not stabilized in a place, but rather flow, exchange and link people together, no matter how similar and how different we are. •



*An Itch You Can't Scratch* 2017. Images are properties of the artist.

## MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

### DIAGNOSING THE ITCH YOU CAN'T SCRATCH

**Critical essay of artist Sasha Mishkin's practice by curator Stella Tan.**

Currently a master candidate of art at UNSW Art & Design, American photography-based artist Sasha Mishkin draws her inspiration from the political climates in both her country of origin and the country where she now lives. Hailing from the worldwide metropolitan hub of New York, Mishkin is not a stranger to immigration bureaucracy as she grew up observing the prevalent struggles of migrants in her city. As Mishkin explains, "I grew up in a time when immigration and border control were hot button political issues exacerbated by the war on terror. As a result, migration has featured as a theme in my artwork and continues to do so." In addition to this, Mishkin also reflects on her own experiences as an immigrant here in Australia; a set of experiences which is reflected in the photography series *An Itch You Can't Scratch*, alongside the multimedia installation *Blood Brothers (ANZUS)*, which critically investigates the underlying relationship between the United States and Australia.

Being a platform to initiate dialogues regarding the struggles and identities of international students in Sydney, *Dislocation* is proud to include Mishkin's projects into the constellation as we learn more about the circumstances, experiences, and reflections that feed into the strong character manifested in her practice.

In *An Itch You Can't Scratch*, Mishkin explains the photography series to reflect on "... The stigmatisation of various visas currently under scrutiny by the Australian government and media", such as the recently abolished 457 visa subclass, which rests uncomfortably on a male's inner thigh. She further explains her thoughtful selection of the models, and the best way to present them:

*Each individual in the series is a migrant who has faced hardships in the process of acquiring a visa. The physicality of the anonymised bodies conveys the feeling of dehumanisation that accompanies the increasingly restrictive process of applying for Australian visas."*

(Mishkin, 2017)

Complementing her photography series, the single-channel looped video included in Mishkin's installation work *Blood Brothers (ANZUS)* condemns the military alliance between Australia and the United States; a bloody business which literally seeps through, and drips, from two shaking hands down to a physical sand map on the ground below. The map depicts seven countries, highlighted in crimson stains, where the two first-world governments have had joint military involvement. The powerful work is further enhanced with an audio recording of striking missiles, which is played through headphones as a gesture of discretion for the viewers, giving them the option of whether or not to listen.

The inclusion of Mishkin's works in *Dislocation* encourages a dialogue far beyond the daily trivialities of integrating into new territories. It shines light on the fatal deals that sustain the politics which affect us. The representation of itches as a nagging irritation on the skin, and surface may hint at an urgent condition that has a notable chance of worsening. This same urgency is expressed in the constant loop of a bleeding handshake and its hammering missile strikes presented through the corresponding work. •



# THE VALUE OF A PLACE CALLED HOME

**Personal essay by Emma-Kate Wilson exploring the work of Linda Sok and what it means to start a new life away from 'home'.**

What does it take to feel like you belong in a place? A home? A job? People around you who treat you like family? How easy is it to build up these elements from nothing, a clean slate of possibility in a new country or town? What about feeling accepted into a new community regardless of the one you came from? All these questions allude to the great unknown of moving away from somewhere you feel comfortable, from somewhere your skills and knowledge of the world can be transferred. What if what you are moving away from is like a fire; burning, smoking, and destroying everything you knew that was safe.

When I moved away from home for the first time at 18, I knew I could always go back. It wasn't running away; rather a hurried walk. Scared that something would pop up and make me stay, rather than forcing me to go. I looked around me and saw the patterns of kids doing the same thing their parents did. School, university, marriage, kids... repeat. I felt like I walked on wet cement, every time I stood for too long in one place I felt my feet grounding. I moved back home from South Africa before I turned 19 and waited 6 months

in waves of memories that wouldn't go away before arriving in Sydney on 6 January 2013. I think of this date like my Australia birthday, when I arrived with a clean new palette ready to use in a place that I feel always washes anew whenever I need it to. As someone from the countryside in England, stuck in the middle of the small little island, being by the ocean flooded me with possibilities. Here I could do anything, I wasn't trapped by preconceived ideas of what my life would look like. Instead, my future looked incredibly blank, stark of any kind of pattern or colour. Like the horizon on a grey day, disappearing into the vast emptiness of water meeting the atmosphere.

Linda Sok and I both shared these moments of pressure when contemplating the right thing to do at 18. Whether our own paths would be what was right, or completely and terribly wrong. Of course, no path ends up being wrong and for Sok, ending up in Canberra studying commerce and science could arguably be the source of inspiration for her artwork. After deciding to run away from Canberra, and bunking with a friend in Sydney, her Cambodian father emailed her: "come back home." These words stayed with Sok; how easy it was for her to go home. Not as a failure, but as a restart and a reflection on our own emotions and thoughts becoming situated within time and place. However, as we see in the manifestation of earlier artworks,



*Come Back Home II* 2017

*Come Back Home II* embodies a history and lineage from her parents' own coming of age during the Khmer Rouge dominance in Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge, known also as the Pol Pot Regime, saw the genocide of an estimated 1.7 million Khmers. The word 'estimated' is key because no one knows the truth, apart from the gaps when a quarter of the population is gone. Sok's parents, of Chinese-Cambodian decent, were one of the targeted groups. They didn't leave home to explore the world or escape routine, but fled death and pain. *Come Back Home II* speaks to the trauma left when you can't return home. Sok explores heavy concepts of Primitive Communism, like the concept of returning to 'year zero', where 90% of artists were murdered; Post Colonialism, where the retreat of the French left a scarring power vacuum; and Neo

Colonialism, with other countries such as America using pressure and influence to control, and ultimately leaving Cambodia crippled with the debt that allowed the "Red Khmers" to come to power.

*Come Back Home II* has been developed through combining the elements of materiality and objectivity; two composite components Sok hopes to bring together through her work. The objectivity of her family's history plays into the literal materiality of her pieces. Sok tells me her father left Cambodia in December 1979 and spent four years in a Thai refugee camp before arriving in Australia in January 1983. Her mother left just after this in 1984 and stayed at the refugee camp until July 1987. However, unlike Sok and my experiences of leaving home, going back wasn't ever an option. Sok brings this to life through the medium of *Come Back Home II*.

The words written in Khmer glow, bringing about their own symbolic presence; the words as sculptural as they are meaningful to those who can read it. By using a black mirror surface as the platform for the words, the meaning is amplified as it creates a duality of signified meaning. The audience is also reflected and placed into the art work. Sok makes us contemplate our own placement in this position, our faces framed by the orange glowing text, and thus the effect our lives have within the greater world. However, by using the Cambodian language to ask the audience to "come back home", like her father did to her, she isolates us and instead homes in on Cambodian viewers who have been left out of the history books and whose culture been left forgotten.

Going back home is something Sok's parents still yearn for. Her father is the president of The Salvation & Cambodian Culture Association of NSW, a group that brings people together through food and prayer. For them, the realms of safety aren't back home; so, by forming an association they can keep their culture alive and provide a support group together. Through this they organise a yearly festival that brings together the community from the original Cambodian suburb Canley Vale. Sok uses her art to connect back to her parents and her roots. *Come Back Home II* has its meaning reflected in the mirror and thus subverts the message onto itself. We are home now, this is it for us. You can't send someone back to where they came from when that place is permanently gone. Whether that's Sok's parents' home in Cambodia, or mine in England. For them literally and for me metaphorically. This is my chosen home now and it's here that I have my life. If the visa runs out it's back to a blank slate, because for some, going back to the place where you grew up isn't an option in moving forwards with your life. Sok again reminds us of this

in her art. The medium of live wires, slowly filling with electricity and creating at once a still object and something alive with energy, draws you in closer to touch. The painful reality of returning home and not being able to is literally in the heat of the wires.

I feel like a common concern of Australian citizens is that refugees and immigrants won't conform to the standards they want them to. Why must everyone speak English? Why do immigrants need to leave behind their culture in order to "fit in"? In attempts to achieve constant growth, do we forget about what is important? Like caring for people when they need help? Not crippling them with debt? Moving to Australia freed me from my own fears and I feel so lucky I was allowed that as a British citizen. I won't trivialise my own experience by Sok's parents, rather it gives me the confidence to share these stories that artists construct. Sok's work is so incredibly clever, in that she has created something beautiful, abstract, reflective and meaningful. The combination of materiality and objectivity conveys her parent's stories; stories of their country that can be told and can reach people outside of a history book.

Moving away from home and to the other side of the world taught me how strong people are. We can withstand loss to a degree larger than anything I could have imagined. Most importantly it made me realise how much we need each other, through cultures and communities we can make our voices heard, or simply amplify the ones of the people we believe in. •

# HAVE YOU EATEN?



*Have You Eaten? 2012-2017, detail*

## Artist interview with Rumpa Paweenpongpat by curator Dara Wei.

Browsing Rumpa's website is an experience like no others. A kaleidoscope of vibrant colours, the cyber encounter of the artist's creations is like stumbling into a rabbit hole where 'wow' and 'hum... very interesting' come hand in hand with frequent giggles and clicking-for-more.

Rumpa engages with a wide range of mediums in experimental ways: textiles, etching, collage, ceramics, video projection and installation. Whilst being a curious mind, Rumpa's practice is woven together by a few common threads such as politics, gender, identity and dislocation through spicy humour that guarantees to draw you in. The consistent bilingual texts appearing on the website and elsewhere are telling of the artist's dislocated – or perhaps constantly relocated and reconciled – experience of studying, living and working in Sydney as an international student away

from her homeland, Thailand, and everything that comes along with it.

Rumpa has a lot to say. Her work for *Dislocation* is *Have You Eaten?*, a body of work featuring a video of phone call clips with her parents who are currently living in Thailand, a beanie created out of her father's old airplane socks, and a blue knitted scarf Rumpa and her grandfather took turns to make. Bonding, both literally and rhetorically, seems to be a recurring theme found in Rumpa's work. Perhaps this is something unique to the artist's personal experience of always being 'somewhere else' rather than 'at home' despite having the ambiguous feeling towards the notion of home shared across the international student community.

Once being an international student myself, I could not relate more to that ambivalent sense of locality, and am always fascinated by how artists in similar situations respond to it in their art practice.



*Have You Eaten? 2012-2017, video still*

**Hi Rumpa, I know that you are currently enjoying your semester break at home in Thailand. Maybe quickly tell us what your trips back home have been so far? What's your plan for the short stay?**

I've been planning house renovations with Mum. My parents used to sell toilets, tiles and other bathroom related things. So we're going through the dead stocks and planning on repurposing them. I've also been sourcing things to take back to Sydney to use in my works. My boyfriend's here too and we are heading up to Chiangrai for a few days.

**That sounds so fun! What do you miss the most about home while in Sydney?**

My Grandmum, she's a great laugh. Mum's garden, Dad's food and fresh fruits and veggies, Mum always pick the best ones.

**What do you wish to communicate or express through *Have You Eaten?* Could you tell us a bit more about the work or any stories about it you'd like to share?**

*Have You Eaten?* explores the social and cultural aspect of displacement and cultural plurality through languages and emotional barriers. It mirrors my conflicting absence and presence of the on-going relocation. *Have You Eaten?* resembles my experiences of the simultaneous acceptance and rejection within both Thai and Australian communities. It echoes on the gender roles of women and textiles domestically, especially in the Thai culture that have influenced my upbringing. It is a 30-minute performance, performed without an audience at Smiths Lake. The water was cold and unsettling, while knitting is calm and meditative. The scarf was started in

2012 and has been simultaneously worked on by my grandfather who has Parkinson's Diseases and me. This resembles our subconscious effort to piece together the disconnection within a family bond.

**Have you shown your parents this work? If so how did they respond?**

The phone call in the work was actually with my grandparents. They were more curious about where I was, what I was doing, and how I was sitting on water than the work itself. Mum felt the sense of disconnection and thought it was touching.

My Thai friend who also studied abroad spoke about the work.

*"This piece is simultaneously heartbreaking and heartwarming. As a Thai who had lived abroad, that feeling of connection to "home" in such a disconnected place is overwhelming - there is a feeling of belonging, and yet dislocation from a familiar, safe space, when "home" is two places at once. It brings back the sensation of trying to find myself and my "place" in the midst of life's contradictions."*

Thanita Poob Phuvanatanarabala

**Do you find sourcing materials in everyday life in Sydney different from in Thailand? If so, how is it different and how does it affect your practice?**

We don't have Gumtree freebies in Thailand; things on the street are completely nonfunctional if not rubbish. Although, Thailand is very resourceful in terms of sourcing digitally. It has been hard sourcing

typical Thai things in Sydney. To be able to use something from Thailand or an ornamental object, I need to plan 6-12 months ahead. It's like having two studios 9 hours by plane away from each other. I don't spend enough time in Thailand and it has become more and more like a holiday, so it comes down to collaging, notes and doodles.

**I think the majority of your work is packed with sarcastic humour. Why are you interested in the fun approach?**

I think approaching an intense topic in a humorous way is more enjoyable and effective to go about it. Art doesn't have to be stressful, but addressing an intense subject with art could be efficient. So polarity comes into the picture. I love polarity. I think it reflects well on my conflicting cultural pluralism nature too.

**What else you are working on at the moment? What we could look forward to in the near future?**

I'll be launching my collage booklet and writing pieces soon. I'm looking into bilinguality, languages and translation in the media. A lot of google translations. Also been tackling works on international students regulation on our study programs – for example we have to take on four courses each semester to be eligible to study here. Not to mention the lack of student benefit such as concession opal cards and healthcare. •





*Becoming* 2017

# THE IN-BETWEEN

Hannah Jenkins in conversation with Amanda Lim.

Amanda Lim is sitting in an internet cafe in Jingdezhen, China. She's the only female customer amidst a room of boys playing MMORPGs at 3.30pm, escaping the sweltering heat and responding to my questions over email. I suggested Facebook chat to her, forgetting about the Great Firewall of China – so here we are on email. Well, there she is in Jingdezhen, and here I am in Sydney.

She writes that she was inspired to take up an artist residency in Jingdezhen – “the Porcelain Capital of China” – after seeing some impressive ceramic works in Sydney, which had been made there.

“I came to discover this ‘mysterious-magical’ place,” she writes, “hoping to be inspired and achieve some kind of breakthrough in my art practice.”

Amanda currently works with clay, glass, and recorded audio to explore ideas concerning liminal space.

“I have come to realise that I am a process-driven, experimental artist. I am interested in ephemeral phenomena that are in flux, that ebb and flow and transform in these ‘in-between’ spaces. I am attracted to transitional states where everything is ‘in progress’ and never ‘complete’.”

foreigner, and it is something that I was very self-conscious about in my early days in Sydney. Being somewhat bilingual, I put on my English-speaking persona at university, and put on my Chinese persona when in Chinatown (and even now in China!). The fact that I am assessed to be Chinese or Aussie based on how I look, is something that is part of daily life in Australia. I just find it really intriguing that I can adapt my current identity according to how I want to be perceived by others, and this is something that I have been exploring in my practice recently. My identity is always in a state of flux: I can determine how I want to be perceived, and change the way I speak/ behave immediately. That fascinates me.”

This fluidity of state, of place, and of perspective, is exemplified in *Becoming*. Amanda points out that “glass is a beautiful, elusive material that could be transparent, translucent, or opaque, depending on what happens in the kiln. I love that it is a direct metaphor for the ‘masks’ and personas that I put up when in different social situations – with some people I can be transparent, but with others I am opaque. I do not think that it is a good or bad thing, I think it is just a reflection of the human condition.” This theme is evident in everything she’s shown me – it ties her works together, strengthening the material and metaphysical direction of her practice.

Good or bad, I’m struck by the simultaneous fragility and strength of *Becoming*, and how something so defined appears to also exist in such an evolving state of transformation. Perhaps these complexities and contradictions don’t need a resolution, however, as it is clear Amanda’s practice, identity and even this conversation have been defined by their repletion in the in-between. •

Chance and open-ended processes define her work. She writes: “It’s like a dance between having control and the lack of control; between the material and my intentions. I see my practice as a collaboration with material; I hate for it to be a slave to my intentions.”

As a Chinese Singaporean in Australia, Amanda says she’s been reflecting on her own identity as a fluid artefact, too.

I ask her to elaborate and she responds, “I stand out as an Asian, but I could pass for an Aussie as long as I do not speak. My accent betrays my origins and identity as a

# ORIENTAL BARBIES

Caoife Power in conversation with  
Sabrina Hugo.



Indonesian born, Chinese artist Sabrina Hugo deals with being a woman in Australia, and what it means to be culturally labelled. Drawing from her experiences of moving to Sydney, and the way people have a tendency to create a hierarchy of beauty standards, Sabrina's work is about addressing these points of shame and uncertainty. She turns to her own need to idealise perfection, ironically through the fragile method of ceramics, to address points of shame and discouragement. Instead of discarding her misshapen ceramic dolls, Sabrina recognises the need to admire these imperfections; missing limbs, broken shoulders, lost legs, confronting us with this disobedient admiration that she has for her work.

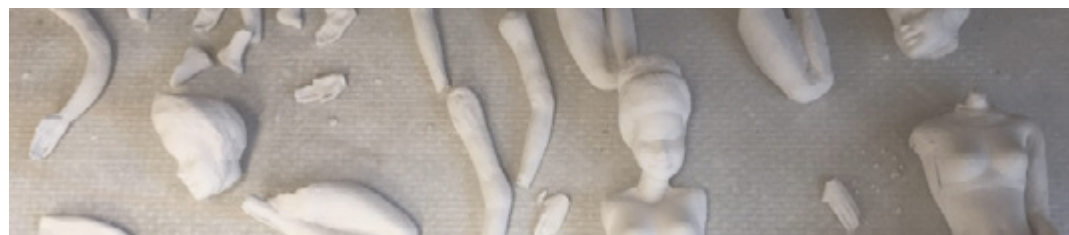
Sabrina's installation *Oriental Barbies* creates a hierarchy of perception; recognising the layering of standards that we place on our bodies. Drawing from her youthful introduction to her first Barbie doll, or what she describes as 'being normal' she uses her work to question what this 'normal' really means. This is a work where standards of class, gender and culture are put on display, recognising the silences within her culture, and creating a conversation that she and others alike can be a part of.

**Barbies can be quite topical for women and the body, why did you want to use the Barbie and what was your idea behind the work?**

My original intention for this work was to talk about beauty standards for all women, and obviously the Barbie is very central to this idea. I used to play with Barbies just like any other young girl, and I never really thought about it as anything else until I started making. People started to put my race in the context of the work without me initially intending it to be there. My teacher (white male) even asked me- why Barbie? As an Asian girl did you play with a Barbie when you were young? Did you realise you were playing with this white body? I recognised that it was confusing for him because the Barbie doesn't look like me.

**I am particularly struck by the word 'Oriental' in your title. Why the choice of this word?**

A lot of people are really awkward in terms of approaching a foreign body. I was at a Uni party in Sydney and someone



*Oriental Barbies 2017, process documentation*

came up to me and was like, you look really pretty, like 'Oriental' pretty. It was as though the kind of beauty I could be was in a different level or class. I started asking myself, what does this mean to be 'Oriental'?

**What about the installation of this work?**

I feel like there is so much that this work actually talks about. So the cabinet represents the hierarchy of the body. The ceramic works that failed are at the bottom and the more idealised and complete dolls are at the top. I thought it was important to include these 'failures' even though I originally wanted to discard them, they ended up being a really important part of this work.

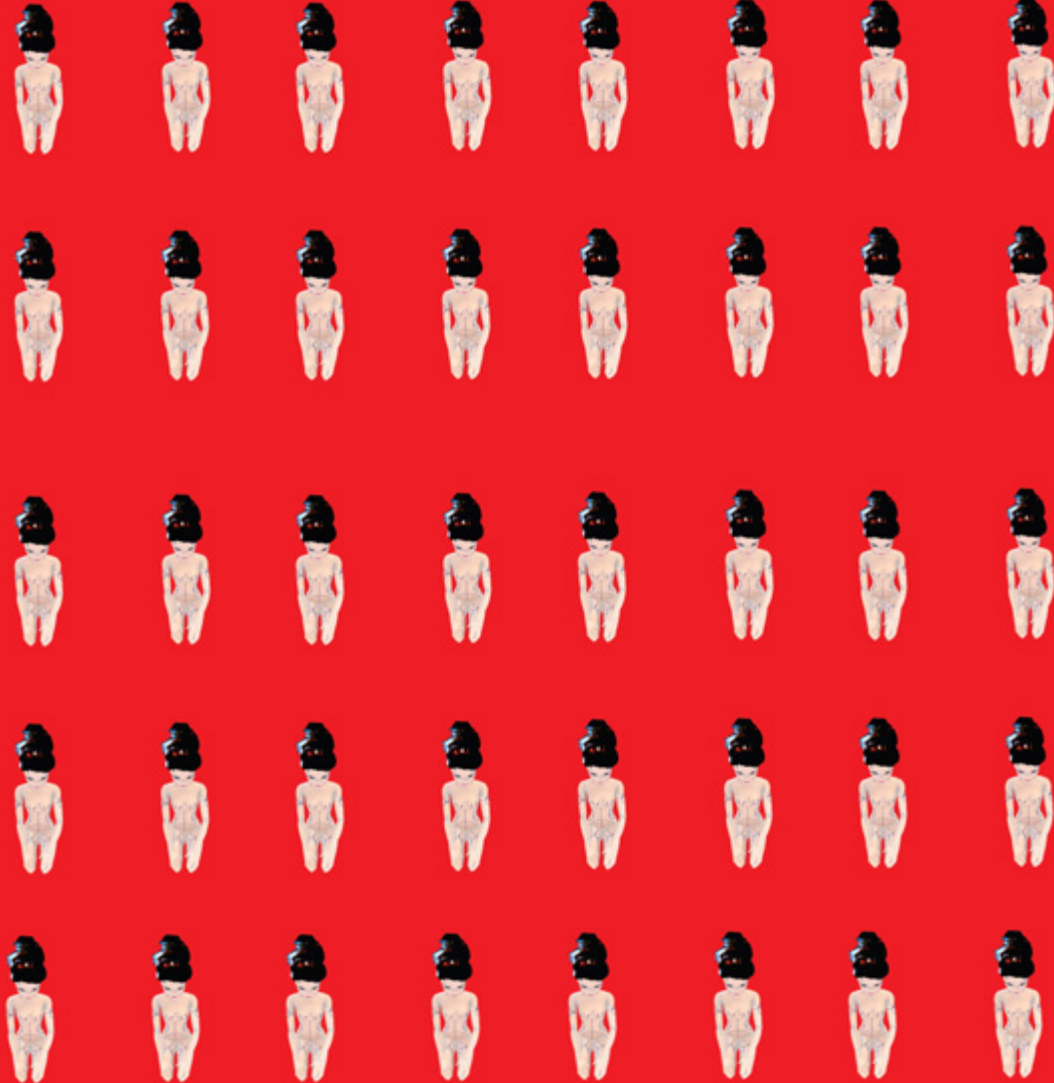
The positioning of the Barbie is also symbolic. The way the Barbie is kneeling down represents this stereotype of the Asian women having to be submissive. The Asian body also has more of a sexual connotation. But at the same time from my culture it means respect and from my religious view it acknowledges humbleness

towards God. It's interesting that cultural perspectives change the way we look at the body and my work.

**Has the making of this work changed your own thinking about your body and yourself as a woman?**

As an artist I just want to be able to talk about my experiences, my ideas and concepts are always changing over time, but right now I am very invested in this idea of the female body and racial aesthetics. It is important to me because I have personal experiences and people in my life that are also working through these issues.

In my culture it is much harder to talk about these issues. It is much more conservative and expected for me to be more silent about it. I feel like it makes it worse because they are under a lot more pressure as women to meet beauty standards and remain passive about it. I feel like it's part of my responsibility as an artist to express this silence and I hope my work finds a space to create a conversation for these women. •



**UNSW Art & Design acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners of the land upon which it stands; the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We also acknowledge Gadigal Elders past, present and into the future.**

Hannah Jenkins, Caoife Power, Cheung Lok Wang Jens, Stella Tan, Dara Wei, Emma-Kate Wilson, Sabrina Hugo, Amanda Lim, Sizhou Liu, Sasha Mishkin, Rumpa Paweenpongpat, Linda Sok